



## MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the  
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# The Real State of Our State

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JEFFERSON CITY – One of the things that make me question the sincerity of the governor is when he said during his State of the State address that he wasn't going to rest until every Missourian has access to affordable healthcare. Well, the truth is the last time he went to work on healthcare, 200,000 people lost their healthcare. The reality is the governor promised he wouldn't cut Medicaid, but he did. I'm certainly going to be working to ensure every Missourian has access to affordable healthcare, but I'm not sure the governor means what he says.

Then there is the governor's Insure Missouri plan, which doesn't do nearly enough to address the needs of people with disabilities who were cut from the healthcare rolls, and it does little to nothing for the children whose insurance was taken away from them. His plan also offers no help to people who are temporarily disabled. The governor's plan privatizes Medicaid to the benefit of private insurance companies. However, some insurance companies don't have contracts with all of the healthcare providers in the region they serve. Like I've said, having health insurance doesn't do you any good if your doctor isn't part of the network of providers. I'm also concerned that people might not be able to afford health insurance if the economy goes south and rates go up.

A better policy is to reverse those Medicaid cuts. Our state has forfeited one billion dollars in federal funds since the cuts were made in 2005. States like Massachusetts that have implemented universal health care for their citizens did so with dollars that rightly belong to Missouri, and we need to find ways to better manage those federal dollars. The governor and legislative leaders did not have a plan to manage the health and welfare of the people of Missouri when those cuts were made – they just made the cuts.

Everywhere I go people tell me that insurance premiums are out of control, and I just want people to understand that when we left that billion dollars in Washington, D.C., hospitals had to provide a lot more uncompensated care, which means somebody else is going to pay for it. That somebody is you, and that's why premiums are going up. I plan to aggressively promote reversing those cuts so everyone is hitched in to the saddle and are pulling the cart in the right direction.

The governor talked a lot about education and the shiny new buildings we're going to build on college campuses, but I think folks need to remember how we got there. For the last two years I've been talking about MOHELA, or what I call MO-STEAL-A. The governor sold our student loan program and cashed it in – the program that provided access to higher education through low-interest loans and loan forgiveness for nurses and doctors – and put that money into new construction. Instead of leaving some of that money in the low-interest loan program, the governor is telling folks the state is offering more scholarships. In fact, he's actually taken a lot of opportunity away and thrown a pittance of that money back toward scholarships. So the talk behind the podium from the glass teleprompter certainly doesn't match the talk that's going on around the dinner tables in my district.

Now, there are some positions where I agree with the governor. We're all frustrated with the lack of action by the federal government on immigration. In fact, my predecessor John Cauthorn and I worked together to include language in a bill targeting employers who hire illegal aliens by cutting their state funding and assessing fines. I think that's what we need to do – cut off their incentives. People need to be responsible – they need to come here the right way. We welcome legal immigrants.

I also support the governor when he talks about the benefits of ethanol and biodiesel. One of the main reasons the people of Missouri should be proud of their representatives is that the leadership of this state 10-12 years ago created a system where it's not ADM that owns these plants; it's the farmers of the state. That means we keep our wealth local. Starting salaries for the top ten jobs in Northeast Missouri average about \$15,000 at the start, and I think the jobs we create through ethanol and biodiesel start out much higher than that. I'm willing to work with the governor on these issues but sometimes we have differences of opinion on how to get the job done.

I also want to clear up some things the governor said about inheriting a budget that was out of control and how he's managed to balance the budget. The fact is, the state has to run on a balanced budget, but the state can also issue bonds, which simply means borrowing money.

From 2005 to today, the state debt has gone from \$3.6 billion to over \$5 billion. So all of this talk about good management and fiscal responsibility just means our kids are going to be responsible for all of this debt. We have also created quasi-governmental entities like the group that gave the tax credits to sports stadiums – the Missouri Finance Development Board. Although this is called non-state debt, these entities directly affect state coffers by providing tax credits. The debt from these tax credits since 2005 has gone from \$17.9 billion to almost \$31 billion.

So, while the governor and the legislative leadership talk about being fiscally responsible, it's going to be up to the legislature – the House and the Senate – to come up with language to rein in these types of entities and put some caps on this type of debt. They are spending our children's inheritance and that's something I plan to work on, even though I haven't heard anyone bring this up as an issue yet.

If you have any questions or comments about this or any other issue, give my Capitol office a call at (573) 751-7852, send me an email at [wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov](mailto:wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov), or drop a line to Room 434, State Capitol, 201 West Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.